

Time Travel to Be Born Again... The Maryland Renaissance Festival Replays the 1500s

by Kate Jones, RFSPE



In case you associate “born again” with a religious ritual, think again. “Renaissance” means rebirth, a necessary evolutionary step leading to the Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries) and modern humanism. The Renaissance emerged from the Middle Ages (around the 12th to 14th centuries) and covered the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe. It was a birth and rebirth of classical thinking and a revival or emergence of art, music, architecture, literature, science, mathematics, and philosophy. So much for dry historical notes.

Fast forward to 1966 when the Society for Creative Anachronism¹ was founded in Berkeley, CA, as a living-history group to study Medieval European culture and do historical reenactments, with costumes and props and tournaments, mostly for sheer fun along with education.

The SCA begat a whole new entertainment form, and by now there are dozens of Medieval and Renaissance Faires² throughout the country, generally in the style of an old English village. The one in Maryland is the second-largest,

founded in 1977. It started in the age of Elizabeth I and for many years has built its script and story lines on the various years of Henry VIII’s reign. The village is called Revel Grove and has hundreds of professional actors, 12 stages, dozens of artisans and craftspeople, plenty of food and drink booths (mead is a favorite), and a full-size joust field with real horses and riders.

The Faire attracts 300,000 visitors during its annual 9-weekend run, many with season passes. Participants and performers are in costume and are encouraged to speak in period lingo, as in “M’Lords and M’Ladies”—imagine Shakespearean dialogues. Many visitors also get in the spirit of the merriment by arriving in costume. A surprisingly large number of visitors are gamers, brainiacs, and computer geeks. Our games (created by my company, Kadon Enterprises) are just their cup of tea.

My little company masquerades as “Ye Olde Gamery” and has been a beloved participant of The Faire for 36 years.³ Starting with a primitive little take-apart booth, we moved up to building

a permanent pavilion. The first one was 16 feet wide, with a slanted roof like a large farmer's vegetable stand. One year, the snow on the roof collapsed the whole deal. We rebuilt it with some reinforcements, and it lasted until Festival management decided some years later to upgrade the look of the whole village. Our options were to build a new and approved building or go away. At my request, they doubled our available lot, and we put up a handsome and spacious pavilion, 24 x 24 x 20 ft, with a turret and a shapely long counter that can accommodate at least 16 visitors at a time to sit and play our games. Chandeliers and authentic antique table covers add to the elegant atmosphere.

Outside, in front of our building, a special play area for the historical "Royal Game of the Goose" is hosted by our Goose Mistress Katrina and entertains passersby all day long. Even the King occasionally stops by to play. That's a big thrill for the visitors. The members of the royal court, lavishly attired, do walk about the village and interact with guests as part of the general entertainment.

Now, to be authentic—a primary requirement—we describe our laser-cut acrylic puzzles as "genuine fake stained glass" mosaics. Other than that, we are as authentic as can be and announce





ourselves as representing “the intellectual side of the Renaissance” and celebrating mathematics, poetry, classical tilings, mosaics, and handcrafted wood gameboards. When people ask how we cut out all those pieces and engrave those wood boards, we tell them we have a well-trained, fire-breathing dragon.

As an “arcade,” we charge \$1 a play (“refunded with purchase”). For exceptional solutions that visitors find, especially the kids, we offer applause and an occasional special gift or prize. For many visitors, the Gamery is their favorite place in the Festival. Some will spend hours with us.





On one wall is a large banner (a gift from a friend and fan, Joe Marasco, PhD) that looks like Don Quixote aiming at a windmill, symbolizing Bayesian reasoning tackling math phobia, magical thinking, and fear of the unknown. It includes Cervantes' quote, "By a small sample we may judge of the whole piece." Fans of probability theory love it.

On another wall is our crest and motto: *Cogitare vivere est*. Adapted from Snoopy, our message is, "To live is to think; to think is to live."

Each weekend, the Festival offers a different theme. One is for senior citizens to get in free. One is for kids. Another is for deaf people, with signing experts on hand to interpret. Then there are also pirates' weekend, Scottish weekend (amazing how many men show up in kilts), Vikings weekend, and the "Day of Wrong" when anything goes as long as it's a costume. Shades of Anachronism as an art form—thank you, SCA.

The Gamery also has one special weekend each year, the last of the season: "A Celebration of



Mind" honoring Martin Gardner's birthday.⁴ Gardner (1914-2010) inspired us to create "recreational mathematics" sets; and 40 years later, we have 213 original puzzles and games, all still in print, and more in the works.

One year our associate, Elijah Allen, carved a pumpkin in the likeness of Martin Gardner. A battery-operated light concealed within gave it a spectacular glow.



This year, a big hoopla about our 40th anniversary went on all year. A giant banner with “40 Years” lettered on it stretched across one whole wall of the Gamery.

For the Celebration of Mind each year, we come up with a different souvenir for the visitors. In 2018, it was the time-travel tale, “When are you?”⁵ (Thank you, *Telicom*, for letting us reprint it from your original version.) For 2019, it was a birthday-cake puzzle/Sudoku challenge with 25 cakes to place on a 5 x 5 board with no two of the same cake in any row. Feel free to print it out for yourself, cut out the pieces, and solve it.⁶

For the Renaissance Festival, I wrote and printed a special 40-page Shakespearean catalog⁷ of all our products; yes, it was all in iambic pentameter and won a Festival award. On its back page is the following Preamble:

Since 1979, the Kadon team
Has brought into the world a wondrous dream—
Original, artistic paradigms
Of good and true and beautiful pastimes.
To celebrate the mind in playful ways,
To find the best path through life’s harrowing maze,
To build a monument to harmony,
To solve and understand all that we see,
In microcosms let us search for truth—
The Universe rewards our quest, forsooth.
Now share with us the joy of thinking clear
And let gamepuzzles fill your life with cheer.
—Kate Jones

Lest readers take this article to be a self-serving promotional piece, I would point out that the kernel of this subject is a philosophical enquiry into human motivation, historical reflection, zest for living, adventurous entertainment, peaceful and lively communal relationships, spirited self-expression, diverse camaraderie, and untrammelled creativity. Imagine that, M’Lords and M’Ladies!

NOTES

1. Wikipedia contributors, “Society for Creative Anachronism,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_for_Creative_Anachronism.
2. Wikipedia contributors, “List of Renaissance Fairs,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Renaissance_fairs.
3. Kadon Enterprises, Inc., “Maryland Renaissance Festival,” www.gamepuzzles.com/renfest.htm.

4. Kadon Enterprises, Inc., “Celebration of Mind 2018: Honoring Martin Gardner (1914-2010),” www.gamepuzzles.com/gcom2018.pdf.

5. Kadon Enterprises, Inc., “When are you?” www.gamepuzzles.com/when.pdf.

6. Kate Jones, “25 CAKES Challenge,” Kadon Enterprises, Inc., www.gamepuzzles.com/cake5x5-COM2019.pdf.

7. “Gamepuzzles!” Kadon Enterprises, Inc., www.gamepuzzles.com/rfcats-2019.pdf. [Ω](#)

*“Imagination is
more important than knowledge.*

*Imagination is
the language of the soul.*

*Pay attention to your imagination
and you will discover
all you need to be fulfilled.”*

—Albert Einstein